

**EVOLUTION OF INTEGRATION GROUPS AND NEW TRENDS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY**

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**Annotation:** This article provides a comprehensive scientific analysis of the stages of formation of economic integration processes, their historical evolution, the role of integration groups in the global economy, and new global economic trends observed in the 21st century. The impact of regional unions on economic relations, foreign trade, investment flows, and increased competitiveness is examined based on scientific sources. In addition, changes in geo-economic processes, the influence of the digital economy on integration, the restructuring of global supply chains, and the integration of the green economy concept into integration processes are also considered.

**Key words:** integration, economic blocs, global economy, currency union, international trade, digital integration, interregional cooperation, supply chains.

Integration processes are one of the most important evolutionary directions of the modern global economy. They are formed and developed under the influence of historical, economic, political, and geostrategic factors. The essence of integration lies in the economic convergence of states based on mutual interests, harmonization of market infrastructure, and reduction of barriers in trade relations. Historically, integration processes initially began with trade liberalization and later evolved into the unification of customs systems, creation of a common market, coordination of economic policies, and even the formation of a single currency policy. The deepening of integration stages has led to increased economic interdependence between states, liberalization of capital movement, and the formation of regional economic blocs. The formation of integration groups is based on several fundamental factors. The first factor is the commonality of economic interests. The volume of mutual trade between regional states, similarity or complementarity of production resources stimulate integration. The second factor is geographical proximity, which strengthens integration due to lower logistics costs and interconnected transport and communication infrastructure. The third factor is political stability and shared geostrategic interests. The fourth factor is the need to expand markets under conditions of global economic competition.

From a historical development perspective, the formation of integration groups is a complex process. For example, the formation of the European Union was linked to the need to ensure stability in Europe after World War II. Starting with the Coal and Steel Community, it gradually deepened into a common market, a single market, and eventually a monetary union. Integration processes in the Americas were mainly focused on trade liberalization and strengthening investment flows, with NAFTA and the current USMCA serving as prominent examples. Integration blocs in Asia are largely associated with the deepening of production chains and investment flows.

The impact of integration on the economy is extremely broad. First of all, integration increases trade volumes by reducing tariffs and customs barriers between states. This ensures the free movement of goods and leads to faster growth of intra-regional trade compared to global trade. The second aspect is the increase in investment flows. Integrated markets are attractive to investors due to the opportunity to operate under unified rules across a large territory. The third

aspect is technological exchange. Integration promotes joint scientific research projects and strengthens innovative cooperation between enterprises. Another important direction of integration impact is production cooperation. Modern supply chains involve multiple countries, where different stages of production take place in different states. This process functions effectively only in the presence of integration structures, as integration simplifies customs procedures, reduces transport costs, and improves logistics efficiency.

In the 21st century, integration processes have entered a new stage. The rapid growth of the digital economy has increasingly shifted integration toward virtual forms. Today, e-commerce, international online trading platforms, fintech services, digital payments, and blockchain technologies are shaping a new understanding of integration. Integration is now associated not only with physical flows of goods but also with digital service flows. The transformation of global supply chains also has a significant impact on integration processes. During the pandemic years, the global economy was forced to reassess the vulnerabilities of global supply chains. Many states began policies aimed at reducing dependence on imports of strategic products such as pharmaceuticals, electronic components, and agricultural goods. As a result, many integration blocs are focusing on strengthening internal supply systems and enhancing economic security.

Another new type of integration is ecological integration. The European Union's "Green Deal" policy is transforming energy policy not only within the EU but also globally. This process includes the formation of joint policies on carbon taxes, environmental standards, and energy-efficient technologies. Green integration is expected to become a leading direction of global integration over the next 20 years.

The intensification of geo-economic competition is also driving a new stage of integration. In particular, technological competition between the United States and China, the emergence of new economic blocs in Asia, and Russia's active integration policy in the Eurasian region are reshaping the global integration map. Integration blocs are now used not only as economic but also as geopolitical instruments.

There are also significant challenges in integration processes. The main challenge is the sharp disparity in economic capabilities among member states. Economically strong states may benefit more from integration, while weaker economies may struggle to compete. Political disagreements, conflicts of national interests, external pressures, and international sanctions can negatively affect integration effectiveness. In addition, increased migration flows have created social challenges in some integration blocs, particularly in the European Union. Issues of national sovereignty have also become relevant, as unified policies require states to transfer certain powers to transnational institutions. Despite these complex and multifaceted processes, integration plays a central role in the sustainable development of the global economy. Integration is not only an economic mechanism but also a key driver of political, social, scientific, technological, and cultural cooperation. In the future, integration processes are expected to become even more complex, with expansion in new areas such as digital integration, energy integration, and ecological integration.

Today, integration groups are transitioning from traditional economic integration toward broader, multi-layered, and multi-level integration models. These models aim to integrate economic policy, digital standards, environmental regulations, energy systems, financial flows, and technological cooperation. Therefore, integration has become not only an integral component of the global economy but also one of its key strategic mechanisms. The above analysis shows that integration groups have become an integral part of today's global economy. As the world

becomes increasingly complex and interconnected, states seek integration to protect their interests, enhance security, and expand economic opportunities. Close cooperation in trade, investment, technology, digital services, and energy provides significant growth opportunities for states. Although integration is not an ideal process and is influenced by economic disparities, political disagreements, external pressures, and global crises, it remains one of the most important tools for strengthening a country's position in global competition. Overall, the evolution of integration groups continues, and in the future they are expected to deepen further, expanding into areas such as digital integration, environmental standards, supply security, and scientific and technological cooperation. Thus, integration will continue to be one of the most important factors for sustainable and effective development of states in the global economy.

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